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## Jesus the Healer

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2011

### **document version**

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

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### **citation for published version (APA)**

Aigbadumah, C. A. (2011). *Jesus the Healer: A Theological Reflection on the Role of Christology in the Growth of the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Church in Nigeria*. [PhD-Thesis – Research external, graduation internal, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam].

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## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **Mountain of Fire and Miracles Church Practices as a Reflection Of Christological Concerns in Nigerian Churches**

#### **6.0 Introduction**

African theologians consider the AICs critical in Christological formulations in Africa, because of their indigenous slant and quest for an African Jesus who is concerned about the African universe. It is commonly accepted that it is in these churches that an authentic African Christian expression is experienced as against what obtains in the historic churches whose theology is still shaped by Europeans cultural perspective. Not much has been done however in articulating the grassroots Christological experiences in the AICs. Many of the research efforts have always focused on conceptualizing what African images of Jesus should be and few on recording of the valid Christological experiences of the African churches. When this is done, attention is often focused on experiences of African Christians in the mission churches. This is so because many African theologians who delved into Afro-Christological studies are mostly from the mission churches, and their views are often tainted by their denominational emphasis. It is to be seen for example that quite a number of African theologians who have written on Afro Christology are from the mission established churches like the Roman Catholic, the Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, etc; and hardly any from the AICs or Pentecostal denominations.

This chapter is a reflection on how Christology is appropriated in churches in Nigeria other than the mission churches. These churches are the Aladura churches, the Pentecostal churches and the Mountain of Fire and Miracles church. The emphasis here is discovering the meaning of Jesus in these church contexts, and to understand how He is appropriated in worship and in life of members in these three streams of contemporary church movements. The Aladura churches represent the AICs, the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Church represents the new genre of indigenous churches founded by Nigerians that are now more of Pentecostal orientation, and thirdly, the Pentecostal churches. The objective here is to see the different faces of Jesus as experienced in different denominational contexts in Nigeria, and to know if these images register with some Christological motifs creatively suggested by

African theologians such as Jesus ancestor par excellence, proto ancestor, elder brother, chief, healer or medicine man etc.

According to Stanley M. Burgess, Grey B. Mcger and Patrick Alexander, the two foci of the Christian gospel resolve into two interwoven questions; who is Jesus? And what was the meaning or accomplishment of His life? How any religious group thinks about Jesus of Nazareth and responds to the evangelical (i.e., “gospel”), bearing questions about his identity and significance tell us much about the group as it does about Jesus.<sup>1</sup> D. Stinton recognizes the diverse Christologies that have emerged over the years in Africa that stemmed from differences in political, cultural, linguistic, and denominational backgrounds.<sup>2</sup> The variety in Christology is dependent upon these factors, and accordingly, it is possible to have within the same geographical context different Christologies. The focus here is the denominational differences in the portraiture of Jesus. Emphasis will be on exploring the Christological development through popular prayer, songs, epithets, poetry and certain doctrinal emphasis of these churches. The AICs give prominence to reading and interpreting the Scriptures from essentially an African cultural perspective. Robert Hood highlights this as one critical element in indigenous churches, ‘...the fact that theological beliefs can best be discovered from their prayers and hymns.’<sup>3</sup> It is widely acknowledged that it is in these churches that contextualization of gospel is vivid and that here Africans have experienced what it is to be ‘authentically African and Christian’,<sup>4</sup> at the same time.

## **6.1 Christology of the African Indigenous Churches**

In Nigeria, the Aladura churches were pioneers of re-imaging Jesus to fitting into their African context. Ayegboyin noted that a consideration of Aladura Christology shows that these churches have responded to the revelation of the person of Jesus ‘in unique ways that are pragmatic, functional and contextual, reflecting their own understanding and experience of the “one who went about doing good” (Acts 10:38)’. Consequently, they have expressed

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<sup>1</sup> S. Burgess, G. Mcger, and P. Alexander, ‘Jesus Christ in Pentecostalism’, in *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988, 486-487.

<sup>2</sup> D. Stinton, ‘African Christianity’, in L. Houldia, ed. *Jesus in History, Thought and Culture-An Encyclopedia*, Oxford: ABC-CLIO, 2003, 3-13.

<sup>3</sup> R. Hood, *Must God Remain Greek? Afro-Cultures and God-Talk*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1979, 67.

<sup>4</sup> K. Bediako, ‘Biblical Christologies in the context of African Traditional Religions’, in V. Samuel & C. Sugden (ed.), *Sharing Jesus in the Two Thirds World*. Michigan: W B Eerdmans Publishing co, 85..

their impressions of Jesus using Yoruba terminology and functional terms that explicate his activities.<sup>5</sup> Long before African theologians began to write about the express need of having an African Christology informed by African distinctiveness, the Aladura churches had seized the initiative to have various portraiture of Jesus reflective of their experiences of him in their local Nigerian church context.

Many of these images are not documented, but have been passed down from one generation to another through oral tradition. AICs, according to Clarke, do not possess a propositional Christology- that is a Christology based upon written creeds, doctrines, or theological formulae. They have 'an implicit and enacted Christology that draws upon the wellsprings of oral tradition'.<sup>6</sup> This Christology is perhaps best described as oral Christology. Clarke further stated that 'oral theology is the encounter with God through the language that is heard and spoken by the visible and participants of the African universe.'<sup>7</sup> Brinkman lends credence to this view that the theology that is prevalent in the non-Western context is not given to books or academic orientation as in the West but much more of field experience.<sup>8</sup> This kind of theology is aptly described by Jean Marc Ella, the Cameroonian theologian as 'shade-tree theology',<sup>9</sup> where Africans are accustomed to social discourse on issues affecting the community after the day's work. In some contexts, this way of doing theology is referred to as grassroots theology. Oyinloye observes that the concept of the grassroots used to describe the religious experiences of African indigenous churches does not explicitly refer to the poor and the illiterates at the base of society, but to those who are not exposed to advanced and critical level of theological education. They are people who however are earnestly committed to the teachings of Jesus Christ and observance of same in faith and practice.<sup>10</sup> This is also expressed in Kathryn Turner's definition of theologies of the people cited by Stinton,

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<sup>5</sup> D. Ayegboyin, 'L'Oruko Jesu: Aladura Grass-roots Christology', *Journal of African Christian Thought*, Vol.8, 1, June 2005, 11- 21.

<sup>6</sup> C. Clarke, 'Towards a Post- Missionary Oral Christology among African Indigenous Churches in Ghana', *Journal of African Christian Thought*, Vol.8, 1, June 2005, 3-10.

<sup>7</sup> C. Clarke, 'Towards a Post- Missionary Oral Christology among African Indigenous Churches in Ghana', 4.

<sup>8</sup> M. Brinkman, *The Non-Western Jesus, Jesus as Bodhisattva, Avatara, Guru, Prophet, Ancestor or Healer?*, London: Equinox, 2007, xi.

<sup>9</sup> D. Stinton, 'Africa, East and West' in J. Parratt, ed., *An Introduction to Third World Theologies*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 108.

<sup>10</sup> D. A. Oyinloye, 'Christology from Below: A reflection on Christological elements in selected Yoruba Gospel Songs.' in S. O Abogunrin et al, *Christology in African Context*, 260.

(Christologies) without much textual or even extended verbal expression which are simply found, more often than not, fully embedded in the religious practices and lived relations of those, who, with reference to intellectual training, social standing, economic attainment or institutional position cannot be counted among the elites of church and society.<sup>11</sup>

Bediako noted that the African theologian should have an ear to the ground hear the pulse from the experiences of the grassroots people because this is where true and living faith in African Christianity can be seen. He counselled that

We ought to speak positively of oral, spontaneous, implicit or grass root theology, as theology which comes from where the faith lives, in the life situation of the community of faith. Accordingly, this 'grassroots' theology is an abiding element of all theology, and therefore, one that is essential for academic theology to be in touch with, to listen to, to share in, and to learn from, but never to replace this spontaneous or grass root theology because the two are complementary aspect of reality.<sup>12</sup>

What obtains at the grass roots is a true reflection of the people's perception of reality. John Pobee, another African theologian describes oral theology as the stream in which the vitality of the people of faith in Africa, literate and illiterate is mediated.<sup>13</sup>

As earlier said, the prayers, songs drama, iconography, arts and preaching revolving around the person of Jesus explicate Africans' understanding of his identity, and what he has done for them. Prayer in the AICs is not only supplication to the Almighty God, but also regarded as the sacrifice the individual has to make to have his or her needs met. Among the Yoruba indigenous churches, it is common to hear songs like *Adura ni ebo mi*, meaning prayer is my sacrifice. The linkage between prayer and sacrifice in the AICs is a notion borrowed from their African traditional religion background where so much is attached to sacrifice and its salvific importance. Now that such sacrifices are detested in their new found faith, they consider prayer and piety as an alternative to the animal sacrifice they offered in their traditional religion. The Christological significance is that prayers are offered in Jesus name.

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<sup>11</sup> D. Stinton, 'Jesus-Immanuel, Image of the invisible God: Aspects of Popular Christology in Sub-Saharan Africa', *Journal of Reformed Theology* 1(2007) 6-40.

<sup>12</sup> K. Bediako, *Jesus in Africa: The Christian Gospel in African History and Experience*, Akropong-Akuapem, Ghana: Regnum Africa, 2000, 17.

<sup>13</sup> J. Pobee, 'Oral theology and Christian Oral tradition: Challenge to our traditional archival concept.' *Mission Studies*, Vol. vi, 1, 1989, 88.

The AICs have widely acknowledged and appropriated Jesus Christ as their own and hardly is he a stranger in their church context as some African theologians suggest. Prayer, epithets and hymns are rendered adoring Jesus Christ in Yoruba Churches as *oba awon oba* (King of kings), *apata aiye raye*, (rock of ages) *oyigiyigi* (the Almighty) etc. Prayer is offered appropriating the name of Jesus as a mediator and also as a means of making their prayer potent. The Aladura songs have become point of reference in local ecclesial practice because they are a reflection of the people's belief about God, his son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. According to Ayegboyin, the full import of some of the titles ascribed to Jesus among the Aladura comes out in the many *orin emi* (spiritual songs)<sup>14</sup> that characterize worship in this context. These songs, he said, are so called because they were originally composed on the spur of the moment, in contrast to written hymns, as a generous outflow of the human spirit under the influence of the Holy Spirit who is recognized in this context as a prime mover in worship and life.

Jesus Christ is perceptible in prayer and songs of the AICs. For example, Ayegboyin cites the worship experience in the Christ Apostolic Church (CAC), an offshoot of the Aladura church movement, where prayer commences with the invocation of Jesus,

*L'Oruko Jesu*

*L'Oruko Jesu*

*L'Oruko Jesu,*

*L'Oruko Jesu Kristi Oluwa*<sup>15</sup>

In the name of Jesus

In the name of Jesus

In the name of Jesus

In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord

In other instances, the invocation is punctuated by *L'Oruko eje Jesu* (In the name of the blood of Jesus Christ), especially when it has to do with prayer of deliverance or release of perceived captives of the enemy. At the end of this prayer of invocation seeking to bring the presence and power of Jesus Christ to bear in the circumstance of their prayer, there is a collective response in each case of Amin, Amin, Amin, *L'Oruko Jesu*, (Amen, Amen, Amen

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<sup>14</sup> D. Ayegboyin, 'L'Ouko Jesu: Aladura Grass-roots Christology', 17.

<sup>15</sup> D. Ayegboyin, 'L'Oruko Jesu: Aladura Grass-roots Christology', 11.

in Jesus' name). Prayer is believed to be incomplete without invoking or chanting the name of Jesus Christ. At other times, at the end of a prayer session, the congregation is asked to chant the name of Jesus seven times in order to bring the power in that name to bear upon their prayer and to defeat the enemies. The identity of Jesus here is one that has power to bring their prayers to pass. Jesus is often regarded as *Alagbara*, the all powerful one who make impossible things come to reality, as seen in another song

*Alagbara lo lorunmi*

*Alagbara ni Jesu mi*

*Oba to laye ati ekun re ni ikawo'*

*Alagbara ni Jesu mi.*

My God is all powerful

My Jesus is all powerful

He is the king that has the world and its realm in his palm,

My Jesus is all powerful

It is seemingly impossible not to hear the name of Jesus appropriated in one form or the other in the worship context of the AICs, a contrast to the claims of the late Adrian Hastings who noted with concern that '...areas of traditional Christian doctrines which are not reflected in the African past disappear or are marginalized.' He made particular reference to the absence of serious discussion on Christology.<sup>16</sup> Some theologians follow in the line of Hastings by ascribing weak Christology to some of the indigenous churches. However, the Aladura churches stand out amongst indigenous churches that have developed an African Christology based on their perception of Jesus in their context. The Christology adopted or stressed in many of these churches especially as observed in their popular hymns and songs, according to Robert Hood, is the triumphant Christology.<sup>17</sup> Jesus Christ is seen as a conqueror over natural and elemental forces that trouble mankind. He is a victor who takes on the enemy and vanquishes them and delivers their victims from the throes of anguish, suffering and death. Jesus is considered as an impregnable fortress that the weak and the troubled run for safety and deliverance.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> V. Jan, *Oral Tradition*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1989, 1.

<sup>17</sup> R. Hood, *Must God Remain Greek? Afro-Cultures and God-Talk*, 38.

<sup>18</sup> R. Hood, *Must God Remain Greek? Afro-Cultures and God-Talk*, 38.

Exorcism is an overriding emphasis in these churches and impresses upon the people that Jesus is both a liberator, helper and a rescuer from all sorts of evil prevalent in their environment. Their worldview is a world of spirits as stated previously. There is the constant fear and danger posed by witches, demons, and other malevolent spiritual beings and there is need always to protect one from these evils that abound in the African space. The traditional religion prescribes the use of charms, fetishes, amulets, spells, etc as stated in pervious chapter. The AICs prescribes the name of Jesus, adorning of crucifix, sacred baths to wash away and render impotent evil spells, use of holy water, sleeping in sacred grounds of the church etc. The use of the crucifix is popular in these churches as a sign of protection. This registers with Brinkman's classification of the cross as symbol of conquest, "Christ the victor," as the banner of Christ: here it refers more to the triumphant resurrection than to terrible suffering.<sup>19</sup>

Hood cites the hymnbook of the Cherubim and Seraphim church, one of the many *Aladura* churches in Nigeria, where Jesus is called "the Big Boat which cannot be sunk"-in other words, he is the one who calms the seas and dispels the chaos that is always threatening human life.<sup>20</sup> There is also allusion to Jesus as *Okunruakwakan*, meaning the one who has overcome the strongman;<sup>21</sup> *Ogyampanturudu*, the great wind that precedes the first rain after the dry season. The thought of Jesus in this context is one who brings relief and healing after a dry and retrogressive spell. He is also called *Odokotobonware*, the farmer who is able to cultivate stony land that formerly was fit for thorny bushes. The emphasis here is on the Lord who presides over nature and is able to subjugate same at his behest. Another one of the *Aladura* songs speaks about the providence of Jesus, 'Jesus is the day of the month when I get my pay. The *chief of Christians*, whose shade-trade tree grows money, whose knife cuts great chunks of meat. The big house which takes in travellers, the unused farm where grows the wild yam. The sea, which gives us fat fish.'<sup>22</sup> These are idioms that refer to wealth and affluence in African communities. It is instructive that Jesus is described as a chief of

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<sup>19</sup> M. Brinkman, *The Non-Western Jesus-Jesus as Bodhisattva, Avatara, Guru, Prophet, Ancestor or Healer*, 218.

<sup>20</sup> R. Hood, *Must God Remain Greek? Afro-Cultures and God-Talk*, 38.

<sup>21</sup> R. Hood, *Must God Remain Greek? Afro-Cultures and God-Talk*, 38. The strongman here means the evil one represented by agents of darkness, witches and destructive spirits common in the African society. These are often the objects of prayers and deliverance sessions in the Mountain of Fire and Miracles church.

<sup>22</sup> R. Hood, *Must God Remain Greek? Afro-Cultures and God-Talk*, 38.



Christians because of the dominant role, affluence and influence the local chief wields in the African communities.

He is seen as Creator, the Lord of life who has the resources of this world at his disposal. Jesus provides for the needs of his own against the background of widespread poverty and lack in the African society. Jesus is preached in this context as creator, preserver, provider and healer. He is referred to as *Olupese*, the Lord of all provisions. The emphasis here is the miraculous provision of Jesus Christ as seen in His providing their basic necessities of life, giving them jobs, business contracts, and making life generally pleasant and easy for them. Hood said that indigenous worship practices are an important reason for growth among these churches, because these practices appeals to the poor, underprivileged and the disadvantaged Africans.

## **6.2 Jesus Christ the Healer in the AICs**

One way in which the AIC churches appropriate Jesus Christ is in the context of healing. Appiah-Kubi, a Ghanaian theologian reasons that AICs appeals to and attract many Africans in need of protection, employment, promotion in jobs and business, education, marriage, and political career. But the most important single reason why people join the AICs, according to Kubi, is the quest for *healing*.<sup>23</sup> Jesus is perceived as a healer par excellence who has power to heal all diseases, including psychic afflictions and all impediments to absolute well being. It is instructive to note that the Aladura movement emerged on the quest for supernatural healing in the face of deadly worldwide influenza that threatened whole communities in Nigeria in the early part of the twentieth century. They saw in Jesus the itinerant preacher, and teacher in the New Testament as the solution and rightly ascribed to him the title *Oluwosan Ode-Orun*, the healer from above.

Christ's death and resurrection is seen from the perspective of wholesome delivery of good health to mankind. Healing is obtained in these contexts through appropriating the power in the name of Jesus Christ and the blood of Jesus Christ. In some indigenous churches the appropriation of the name of Jesus Christ goes along with the usage of other healing paraphernalia such as holy water, anointing oil, fruits, and other elements found in the

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<sup>23</sup> K. Appiah-Kubi, 'Indigenous African Churches: Signs of Authenticity', 121.

locality. In some Aladura churches, the use of the Psalms mixed with traditional elements are believed to be efficacious in the healing process. Triumphant Christology is also expressed in the victory of Jesus' resurrection as popularly observed during the Easter event. As Robert Hood observes of African and Caribbean societies, 'Christ's Lordship also includes triumph over demons, which, as we saw, were adopted by the New Testament from popular Judaism as manifestations of evil, as well as the causes for sickness and mental disorders, a belief also in African and Afro Caribbean cultures.'<sup>24</sup> The significance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is brought to bear in the Easter event annually when members of these churches hold procession through the streets of major cities in Nigeria, dramatizing the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ on the Good Friday and Easter Monday.<sup>25</sup> They see in the resurrection of Jesus salvation from sin, from pain and sufferings and that Jesus empowers them to overcome evil forces. The popular song among the Yoruba churches at Easter is,

*Iku oro ti'mbaku*

*Iya ese ti mba je,*

*Gbo Gbo re lotiko lo,*

*Jesu Oluwa oma seun o*

*Tori emi lofi j'iya*

The agonizing death that would have been mine

The sufferings caused by my sins

He has borne all of them away

Jesus my Lord, I am thankful

You suffered because of me.

Hood refers to the Cherubim and Seraphim Holy Hymn book where Jesus' death and resurrection is celebrated as the 'first-born child who knows death's antidote. Jesus is the wall which bars death from entry and makes many hearts leap for joy. He is the resurrected body who raised himself from three days in the grave. Storehouse of wisdom! Jesus is the one shouted at death and death ran from his face.'<sup>26</sup> Victories over death and merchants of death (witches, wicked spirits, and demons) echoes in local hymnody because of the inherent world view which tend to ascribe causality to prevalence of evil spirits in the society.

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<sup>24</sup> R. Hood, *Must God Remain Greek? Afro-Cultures and God-Talk*, 165

<sup>25</sup> The Easter procession has always been a sore point in Christian and Muslim relationship in Nigeria, especially in the North. The Muslims would want Christian festivals confined to church premises rather than going to town in procession. This has often led to altercations and religious riots by adherents of both faiths.

<sup>26</sup> R. Hood, *Must God Remain Greek? Afro-Cultures and God-Talk*, 39.

### 6.3 Some Images of Jesus Christ in the AIC Churches

Most of the images mentioned above observed in the AICs are drawn from local idioms and pithy sayings of the local cultures. However, there are other images expressive of personages in the community, such as king, prophet, priest etc. These are descriptive of the importance, power and influence these personages command in their respective communities and how the person of Jesus, though more superior, fits into these descriptions. Some of these images are enunciated below.

#### 6.3.1 Jesus as King

One of the images used to describe Jesus in the Aladura churches as conveyed in several songs is *Oba* (King), and not just as an ordinary mortal king that are many in their locality, but the '*Oba awon Oba*', (the King of kings), '*Oluwa awon oluwa*' (Lord of lords) one whose dominion and reign is incomparable to that of mortal kings. Ayegboyin observes that the Aladura do not merely ascribe the powers and authorities of kings and traditional divinities to Christ, they do so in comparative and superlative terms, Jesus' kingship and divinity being affirmed as superior.<sup>27</sup> Oyinloye reasons that among the Yoruba, the Oba is the embodiment of the state. The Oba is invested with a lot of authority and surrounded with an aura of dignity. He is revered as one whose authority emanates from the deity and hence possessing divine attribute and viceroy of the gods and hence often referred to as *Oba alase*, *Igba keji Orisa* (king, ruler and second in command of the deity). He has absolute authority over the land and over issues brought before him.

The insignia often used to represent the ruler ship of the Oba among the Yoruba is the palm tree. The palm tree is a cash crop and major source of income and staple food for them. Life is inconceivable without the palm tree, the nuts that are eaten and processed for other uses, the fronds are used for brooms, the tree trunk used for buildings, and chiefly, the palm oil is consumed and used for production of other household needs. There is hardly any domestic or social function that one product of the palm tree is not used. The ownership of all palm trees in the domain of the Oba in principle belongs to him, but seldom in practice. The

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<sup>27</sup> D. Ayegboyin, 'L'Ouko Jesu: Aladura Grass-roots Christology.' 17.

implication is that the political, socio-economic life of the people revolves around the king, and his presence is indispensable to the continuing existence of the community. He wields enormous religious, political and economic powers over the land and people. He is greeted as ‘*Kabiyesi*’, a contraption of the sentence ‘*Ki a bi ko si* (One whose authority is limitless). The office and authority of the Oba among the Yoruba remains the highest in the people’s social political order next to the gods.

Jesus Christ is depicted in several Aladura songs as *Oba*, but one who is far greater than their mortal kings. Christ is seen as absolute ruler over the entire universe and in their perception, possesses all authority in heaven and on earth. He is an Oba with a great difference as seen in one of the numerous Aladura songs,

*Jesu Oba lori aye, lori aye at’ orun,*  
*Mojuba re o, akoda aye, Aseda Orun,*  
*Oke lehin onigbagbo,*  
*Sara re, Osuba re*  
*Atobajaye, aseda Orun*  
*Iwo lope ye.*

Jesus the king over the whole earth,  
Over the earth and the heavens,  
I worship you, the first begotten of the universe,  
The creator of the World, A mighty bulwark of the world,  
Your majesty, we worship you,  
The maker of heaven and earth,  
You are worthy of our praise.

*Jesu l’oba ayeraye o,*  
*Jesu, l’oba ayeraye,*  
*O tobi, O l’agbara,*  
*K’o tu s’oba miran leyin re,*  
*Jesu l’Oba ayeraye.*

Jesus is the everlasting King o,  
Jesus is the everlasting King,  
He is big, He all powerful,

There is no king other than you,  
Jesus is the everlasting King.

In acknowledging that Jesus is the everlasting and all powerful king, he is compared with mortal Yoruba *obas* or kings whose reign is transient and do not have absolute power. Jesus is regarded in the Aladura context as the creator and one who possesses absolute power over all realms. His dominion and reign cannot compare with mortal kings. This fact is stressed in yet another song

*Oba ni o, Oba ni o (3ce)*  
*Oba to ju oba lo,*  
*Your Excellency kabiyesi o,*  
*O ba to ju oba lo,*  
*Your supremacy kabiyesi o,*  
*Oba to ju oba lo*

The king who is greater than all other kings,  
Your Excellency and Lorship,  
The King greater than other kings,  
Your Lordship and Supreme king,  
The King greater than other kings

This song which is interlaced with some English words elicits faith in adherents as they see Jesus as all powerful and able to do all things. Ayegboyin reckons that the Aladura insist that Jesus, is the ultimate king, the real custodian of the land and the lord of creation. Jesus kingship is sharply in contrast to the temporal nature of earthly kings who may be deposed in deference to the wishes of the people. He said that the Aladura perception of the person of Jesus is that of the institution of the Oba in the Yoruba culture, which is the ultimate symbol of power, both as temporal authority and as vice regent of the divinities is now subsumed under the kingship of Jesus.

### **6.3.2 Jesus Christ as a Priest**

Jesus Christ is widely acknowledged among the Aladura churches as regards his priestly or mediatory role, severally as Jesu, *Omo Olorun* (Jesus, the son of God), *apata aye*

*r'aiye*, (Rock of Ages), *Oga Ogo*, (Lord of glory) *Oludande*, (the deliverer), *Olugbala*, (Saviour), *Olutunsile* (liberator) etc. In the previous chapter, the role of the local priest in the traditional religion was stressed chiefly as an intermediary between the world of the spirits (unseen realm) and the natural realm of humans. Among the Yorubas, the priest is often referred to as *Onisegun* or herbalist; soothsayer or oracle consult in the community, a diviner or *babalawo*; who sees into the spiritual realm and relates with spiritual beings which the ordinary eye cannot see; the judge who mediates between individuals, families and communities and apply appropriate sanctions where desirable. However, the Aladuras are reluctant in ascribing the image of the local priest, popularly called *babalawo* to Jesus because, according to Ayegboyin, the *babalawos* are mere mortals with limitations, and use all kinds of objects to aid the healing process. Unlike these traditional healers, the healing virtues of Jesus are supernatural and activated by faith.

It is also on the historical account that the *babalawos* posed a challenge to the proselyting activities of the missionaries and their native converts at the onset of the Christian enterprise where they tried to hinder Christianity making inroads to the turf of African traditional religion. There is an Aladura song reminiscence of one of those episodes:

*Ayankasi ol'ogun*

*Ayankasi ol'ogun*

*Bowo mi ba te Psalmu*

*Ayankasi o'logun*

Shame unto the herbalist,

Shame unto the herbalist,

As soon as I get hold of the Psalms,

I fear no herbalist.

In the times past, there was acrimony between the herbalist and the Christian, as the Christians always view the herbalists as antagonist to his faith who must be confronted using the instrumentality of the Psalms in the Bible.

In one of the Aladura churches, the Cherubim and Seraphim, Jesus Christ is reimagined as *orisha*, one of the chief divinities of the Yoruba traditional religion because of his

mediatory role between God and humans.<sup>28</sup> In the Yoruba traditional religion, Olodumare is acknowledged to be the Supreme Being. He is the Deity that is acknowledged and worshipped in all of Yorubaland.<sup>29</sup> He is the head and overlord of all in heaven and on earth; indisputably, absolutely unique and beyond comparison in majesty and fullness of attributes.<sup>29</sup> He does not relate with humans directly but has intermediaries in the divinities who are sometimes believed to be deified ancestors, and that is why they are closely related to human activities.<sup>30</sup> Chief among these divinities is orisa-nla who Olodumare committed the task of creating and running the affairs of the world as his viceroy. This is similar to the Christian thought of Jesus as creator and mediator between God and men, and that is why the Cherubim and Seraphim adopted the concept of Orisa in their belief.

In other African traditions, the role of ancestors is prominent in the communities as progenitors or founders of their clans, protectors and guardians to whom the living owe loyalty through regular sacrifices. They are believed to be the living dead and in some cultures are venerated because of their role and continuous presence. This is why some African theologians subscribe to the notion of reimagining Jesus as ancestor in the African context because he is the founder, sustainer and provider for his family, the church and he lives with them continuously.

However, Stinton noted that such reimagining is rejected in some quarters because of the negative connotation that ancestor worship had derived and how the missionaries had denigrated its usage over time.<sup>31</sup> Aiyegboyin acknowledges the limits of cultural transposition. For example, he said there is overt unwillingness of the Aladura churches to ascribe the title of an ancestor (*Iserun* in Yoruba) to Jesus because according to him, they reason that such titles will belittle His divine nature as the son of God as they understand him to be.<sup>32</sup> Although, as earlier said, an arm of the Aladura church movement are involved in veneration of ancestors, in general, many of these churches abhor this practice. Besides, ancestors are perceived in some of these churches as evil spirits or demons taking the form of dead parents who are long gone. Accordingly, they are demon spirits which need to be

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<sup>28</sup> R. Hood, *Must God remain Greek, Afro Cultures and God talk*, 22.

<sup>29</sup> E. Bolaji Idowu, *Olodumare –God in Yoruba Belief*, 33.

<sup>30</sup> E. Bolaji Idowu, *Olodumare –God in Yoruba Belief*, 111.

<sup>31</sup> D. Stinton, 'African Christianity' in L. Houldia, ed. *Jesus in History, Thought and Culture-An Encyclopedia*, 10.

<sup>32</sup> D. Aiyegboyin, 'L'oruko Jesus: Aladura Grass-roots Christology', 13.

confronted and exorcised or idols which need to be spurned, as they will only lead to further misery and bondage.<sup>33</sup>

### **6.1.5 Jesus as a Prophet**

The prophet motif is popular among the Aladura churches because of their preference for the Old Testament narratives that speak about miraculous interventions of God in human situations particularly in the history of the nation of Israel. The role of the prophet as God's spokesperson and agent of deliverance is appealing to many of these indigenous churches as they often compare their context of extreme situation of economic deprivation and spiritual oppression and affliction brought about by the presence of evil forces in their society to the experience of the Israelites in captivity. The Old Testament narratives of Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt, Samson and his numerous victories over the Philistines, Gideon and the Midianites and most significant of all, Elijah and the contest on Mount Carmel with the prophets of Baal resonates in these churches as popular stories of God's deliverance of His people.

Two things stand out clear here, the towering figure of the prophet of God who demonstrates the power of God as a hopeless and helpless people watch, and secondly, the mysterious acts of deliverance of God for His people. In the former, the individual is empowered by the Holy Spirit to perform extra ordinary acts that bring deliverance of God's people. It is often believed in some of these churches that power lies in the authority and pronouncement of the prophets. Ayegboyin affirms the emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit in the Aladura churches as earlier stated. The presence of the Holy Spirit (*Emi mimo*) is equated with the power of God. In the Old and New Testaments, the Holy Spirit came on mortal men and used them to perform exceptional miracles. This, the leaders of the indigenous churches found appealing, because as Ayegboyin noted that one of the concerns of many Yoruba is to be delivered from all physical pain and from oppression by evil spirits.<sup>34</sup> The power of the Holy Spirit brings deliverance. Ayegboyin reasons that in Aladura theology, the Holy Spirit, Jesus and God are mutually involved in the work of revelation and deliverance. Accordingly, in Aladura religious consciousness, there is no need to distinguish

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<sup>33</sup> A. Anderson, 'African Pentecostalism and the Ancestors: Confrontation or Compromise?', *Missionalia* 21, April 1993.

<sup>34</sup> D. Ayegboyin, 'L'Ouko Jesu: Aladura Grass-roots Christology', 17.



between the persons of the Trinity, since the persons do not work at cross-purposes. The three persons are credited with all that is good, powerful and redemptive in creation as seen in the lyrics of one of their songs,

*Alagbara ni Baba*

*Alagbara ni Omo*

*Alagbara ni Emi mimo,*

*Yoo se temi pe.*

Power resides in the Father,

Power resides in the Son,

Power resides in the Holy Spirit,

He will perfect that which concerns me.<sup>35</sup>

#### **6.3.4 Jesus Christ's Human and Divine Natures in the AICs**

As stated earlier, for the AICs in Nigeria, the divinity of Jesus Christ is not in doubt, 'For most of them Christ is God and God is Christ'.<sup>36</sup> Many of these churches are faithful to biblical doctrines without contesting or rationalizing them. This accounts for the deep spirituality in these churches because of their wholesome belief in what the Bible teaches and accepting same for faith and life.

It is widely acknowledged that the AICs are not given to much academic quest as they are to spirituality. Because their Christian experience is a living one that seeks to explicate faith in the context of daily living, the church in Africa has become a force to reckon with as adherents and converts are drawn into daily communion with Jesus. This is because for Abogunrin, 'The majority of Africans still live in the world of the New Testament, where belief in demons and a host of unseen supernatural powers is still potent and real. A Jesus emptied of all such supernaturalism as is contained in the Gospels would therefore be meaningless in the African setting.'<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, he stated that one reason that the Gospel of Jesus Christ thrives in Africa today is that,

The sum total of the Christian message is this: that God became incarnate in the historic man, Jesus Christ. The New Testament World, which is said to be

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<sup>35</sup> D. Ayegboyin, 'L'Ouko Jesu: Aladura Grass-roots Christology, 18.

<sup>36</sup> D.A Oyinloye, 'Christology from Below: A reflection on Christological Elements in Selected Yoruba Songs, 265.

<sup>37</sup> S.O. Abogunrin, *In search of the Original Jesus*, 39.

alien to the West of today, is not strange to the present African world. A Jesus emptied of all the supernaturalism that is associated with Him in the Gospels and with His disciples in the Acts of the Apostles will be meaningless and irrelevant in the African context. The concern for the truth and objectivity by scholars must not translate to the rejection of the Bible story and the inherited traditions of the church.<sup>38</sup>

In summary, it is evidently clear that Jesus is much at home in the Aladura churches. Ayegboyin is of the view that the Aladuras place more ‘emphasis on ‘high Christology’ expressing the divinity of Jesus who is the all powerful Son of God who is in touch with the experiences of his children and able to deliver them from all infirmities, fears, anxieties, and death-shines out more in their theology.’<sup>39</sup>

#### **6.4 Christology of the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Church**

The MFM church is primarily concerned with demonstrating the power of Jesus over evil spirits and His ability to save, heal and deliver; and scarcely any theological discourse on the person of Jesus Christ. Some Nigerian theologians have described the MFM as a ‘deliverance ministry *par excellence*’ or distinguish it under the genus of the “security gospel” rather than the “prosperity gospel”.<sup>40</sup> The former terminology refers to emphasis given by some indigenous churches on aspects of the gospel that dwell mainly on protection from evil, malevolent spirits (such as demons witchcraft, familiar and violent spirits etc.) misfortunes, retrogression in life etc. As noted earlier, Jenkins observed that pagan religions have left a potent inheritance in the form of widespread beliefs in spirits and spiritual forces that can be manipulated by human beings.<sup>41</sup> As Elizabeth Isichei observed that the theological emphasis of the mission churches scarcely impacted Africans because the people are concerned about their spiritual and physical well being and deliverance from myriad of evil spirits that abound in their environment. According to Isichei, when prophets of their own rise within their context, speaking to the depth of these needs with all religious consciousness, the people respond in droves into these churches.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>S. O. Abogunrin, *In search of the Original Jesus*, 43.

<sup>39</sup>D. Ayegboyin, ‘L’Ouko Jesu: Aladura Grass-roots Christology’, 19.

<sup>40</sup>D. Ayegboyin, ‘...But Deliver us from Evil...’ The Riposte of the MFM and its Implications for the ‘Reverse in Mission.’ *Orita, Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol. Xxxvii, June & Dec. 2005, 33-64.

<sup>41</sup>P.Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity*, 102.

<sup>42</sup>E. Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa from Antiquity to the Present*, London: SPCK, 179.

Christological emphasis is mainly on how the name of Jesus is applied or appropriated to bring about healing, wholeness, deliverance to the afflicted or infirmed person. They draw largely from Jesus' experience in exorcism as recorded in the synoptic gospels. As noted earlier, the general overseer and founder of the church, Dr. Daniel Olukoya, is the sole theologian. His numerous publications on demonology, witchcraft spirits, marine spirits, mad spirits, exorcism, deliverance from ancestral spirits and household wickedness, dominion prosperity, prayer warfare, prayer to destroy diseases and infirmities etc., attests to the emphasis given to exorcism or deliverance and spiritual warfare. This is corroborated in the vision statement of the church, 'to train believers in the art of spiritual warfare; thus making them an aggressive and victorious army for the Lord'.<sup>43</sup> The Church is regarded as a training ground where people are taught how to individually face life challenges and problems with the 'spiritual' weapons of warfare which include as they describe it:

praying 'militantly' with 'bullets of fire and thunder'. 'slaying the enemy with 'arrows of fire' and swords of deliverance', paralysing the adversary by binding the 'strongman' and bulldozing his stronghold, terminating the operations of satanic powers by destroying spiritual padlocks and destroying the gates of Beelzebub.<sup>44</sup>

The preoccupation of the church as earlier stated is exorcism. According to Ayegboyin, exorcism is a 'specific act of binding and releasing, performed on a person who is believed to be possessed by a non-human malevolent spirit. Prayer for exorcism includes identification of the evil spirit(s), rebuking the demons, laying on of hands, anointing with oil, binding/loosing and throwing out of the evil spirits through the invocation of the name of Jesus'.<sup>45</sup> The Christology of the MFM can be described as a deliverance Christology. The name of Jesus is mostly applied and appropriated in the context of healing and deliverance. Jesus' divinity, human nature, trinity, redemptive works, death and resurrection etc are affirmed in the church's statement of belief posted on their website, and are not subject of theological discourse. In this regard, the church adheres to orthodox Christian doctrine on the person and works of Jesus Christ as articulated in the Old and New Testament, but lays emphasis more on his divinity and power to destroy malevolent spirits. Belief in orthodox doctrines of the Bible is not a subject of debate or controversy in many of the AICs, as noted by the Nigerian Catholic theologian Justin Ukpung. Africans do not question the authenticity,

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<sup>43</sup> <http://www.mountainoffire.org>

<sup>44</sup> D.K. Olukoya, *Prayer Rain*, 25.

<sup>45</sup> D. Ayegboyin, '...But Deliver us from Evil...' The Riposte of the MFM and its Implications for the 'Reverse in Mission.', 46.

historicity or validity of Bible claims, but they simply believe and appropriate relevant texts to their context.<sup>46</sup> These are ordinary readers of the Bible who seek relevance and application of the Bible to their context. Their quest is not on theological discourse but their existential concerns. This appears to be the emphasis given in the MFM Church, as their primary emphasis is on power to destroy the enemy.

Jesus Christ defeated the powers of evil and grants victory and breakthroughs to all who will rightly appropriate his name for this purpose or engage in spiritual warfare to undo the works of darkness associated with the evil one in the African context. References in this regard are made especially in the numerous publications of scriptural references of the victory of Jesus Christ over Satan and demons. Hymns and songs of Christ victory over the devil and his works are sung in the context of worship. The name of Jesus is applied to end all prayers said, in the belief that prayers said in this name bring his power to bear upon the circumstance. Besides, the name is powerful to undo the works of the evil one according to teachings of the New Testament. The name is therefore sought and applied in the quest for supernatural intervention on behalf of the faithful. His name also avails for healing purposes as far as the practices of MFM is concerned. Jesus Christ healed the infirm in the New Testament of all manners of diseases, and is able to do the same today. According to Olukoya, ‘... no matter who the vessel used by God to perform a miracle of healing, Jesus is always the healer, He alone is to receive the glory for any manifestation for the power of God.’<sup>47</sup>

Apart from the name of Jesus, the blood of Jesus is another weapon applied in deliverance theology. Olukoya emphasizes the centrality of the blood of Jesus in the concept of deliverance. He claims that the blood of Jesus is one of the potent weapons against spiritual wickedness in high places and to demolish the stronghold of satanic forces.<sup>48</sup> He admonishes his members to plead the blood of Jesus as they say these prayers

Let the blood of Jesus nullify every spiritual agreement I have made with the spirit husband/wife consciously or unconsciously... Let the blood re-energise,

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<sup>46</sup> J. S. Ukpong, ‘Popular Readings Of The Bible In Africa And Implications For Academic Readings’, in G. O. West and Musa W. Dube (eds.), *The Bible In Africa, Transactions, Trajectories and Trends*, Leiden: Brill 2000, 582.

<sup>47</sup> D. K. Olukoya, *Prayers To Destroy Diseases and Infirmities*, Lagos: Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries Publications, 2000, 53.

<sup>48</sup> D. Ayegboyin, ‘...But Deliver us from Evil...’, 50.

revitalize, reactivate and revive all dead potentials and spiritual gifts within me...<sup>49</sup>

It is important to note here that Jesus is not appropriated in the MFM church the way some African theologians seek to view Jesus from a different paradigm, like Jesus the ancestor per excellence, the elder brother, the medicine man, etc. As much as these new paradigms are fitting in explaining the person of Jesus in an African context, many independent churches in Nigeria have a different view. African theologians seek to make known Christ's immanence in the African cultural context by ascribing images that resonate in African communities. These images reflect important personages highly regarded in African cultures such as ancestors, chief, medicine men etc. The AICs however seek to explicate more of Christ's omnipotence against forces of evil that inhibit quality living and realization of one's aspiration in life. These are the existential concerns of the African. Religion must therefore proffer answers and adequately take care of these concerns for it to be relevant. The stress on spiritual warfare and power to vitiate evil spirits accounts for reason for growth of these churches as observed by Rosalind I. Hackett,

While MFM describes itself as a Christian organization – a 'full gospel ministry'- and indeed members are taught to invoke the name of Jesus as a powerful weapon, the attention given in writings, ritual acts and symbolic communication to satanic forces is overwhelming. When I asked my companion, a woman lawyer who is an avid member of MFM, whether this call for constant vigilance against demonic forces was not an admission of the insufficiency of Christian salvation, she replied that as a non-Nigerian I could not understand the negative powers that beset Nigerians in particular.<sup>50</sup>

In the MFM church, the constant theme is prayer of deliverance as the African universe is filled with demons and the diabolical as noted in their vision statement posted on their website, 'to turn the joy of our enemies to sorrow. That is why we would always have a deliverance ministry wherever we are. If you do not believe in deliverance, you are not supposed to be in MFM.'<sup>51</sup> The socio-cultural milieu of Nigeria has aided the growth of this MFM, because the ordinary Nigerian believes that demons or some wicked forces are responsible for every sickness or problem that confronts them in life. Although some of the practices of this church are clearly anti-culture, in reality however, culture has inadvertently

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<sup>49</sup> D. K. Olukoya, *Prayer Rain*, 189.

<sup>50</sup> R.I.J Hackett, Discourses of Demonization in Africa and Beyond', *Diogenes*, 50(3); 61-75

<sup>51</sup> <http://www.mountainofire.org>. Accessed 20/01/2010.

promoted the growth of this church. This is because the church claims its beliefs and practices are Bible based, but they are also embedded in the culture and religions of the people. Exorcism is not a novelty in the African setting. Igenoza said of the traditional method of exorcism, 'Once it has been established through divination that an evil spirit has been responsible for an undesirable condition in traditional Africa, exorcism usually takes place through a comprehensive approach which would often include placatory sacrifice, incantation, medication, adjuration, homeopathic magic and various forms of rituals and taboos.'<sup>52</sup>

As said earlier, the perception that members of the church have of Jesus can be compared to what obtains in African traditional religion's usage of talisman as a means of quick-fix of any problem. The name of Jesus is invoked to dispel evil spirits just as the charm or talisman is worn. Apart from hymns of worship, there are no teachings on the subject of the personality of Jesus Christ except for healing and deliverance purposes. Subjects like the divinity of Christ, New Testament Christology, Spirit Christology, Logos Christology, historical Jesus etc are believed in this context to be the concerns of theologians and not for ordinary Christians who believe in Christ as the Son of God who has absolute power to overcome the evil one and meet all existential needs. R. Hackett describes the emphasis in MFM this way, 'The distinctive feature of this particular Christian ministry is indeed its elaborate demonology, and its advocacy of a 'Power against Power' approach to life's vicissitudes.'<sup>53</sup> In other words, there is hardly room for reflections, teachings or contemplation on the person of Jesus Christ as stated in their statement of belief, vision and mission statements. In this setting, the stress is on the 'do it yourself' ministry that seeks to explicate the works of Jesus mainly from the perspective of exorcism. There is no room for critical theological reflections or discourse as theologians are looked upon with disdain, and attending seminary is sarcastically equated to going to a cemetery where one's faith is watered down and rendered impotent to meet the peculiar challenges in the African context. Christological emphases in this context dwell mostly on miracles of healings of Jesus and conquest of demons and spirits. What Jenkins observed that 'Christ's victory is epitomized in the cross and crucifixion, themes that are absolutely central to hymns and forms of popular

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<sup>52</sup>A.O. Igenoza, "Exorcism in the Ministry of Jesus and Demonology in the African Context.", in S.O Abogunrin et al (eds.), *Biblical Healing in African Context*, Ibadan: The Nigerian Association for Biblical Studies., 2004, 146.

<sup>53</sup>R.I.J Hackett, Discourses of Demonization in Africa and Beyond', *Diogenes*, 50(3); 61-75.

devotion. Jesus defeated death and sin not just in this world, but in any conceivable realm of spirits or ancestors'<sup>54</sup>, are true of the MFM and other deliverance ministries in Nigeria.

The person of Jesus Christ and his victory on the cross is an established truth in the MFM. His divinity, human nature, trinity, redemptive works, death and resurrection etc once affirmed in the church's statement of belief are not subject of theological discourse but to be believed and applied. What is critical is not the identity but the accomplished works of Christ on the cross. Jesus Christ defeated the powers of evil and grants victory and breakthroughs to all who will rightly appropriate his name for this purpose or engage in spiritual warfare to undo the works of darkness associated with the evil one in the African context. References in this regard are made especially to numerous scriptures of the victory of Jesus Christ over Satan and demons in the New Testament. Hymns and songs of Christ victory over the devil and his works are sung in the context of worship.

The name of Jesus is applied to end all prayers said, in the belief that prayers said in this name are granted by the heavenly father. Adherents are encouraged to go into period of long fasting and prayers to break the yoke of bondage over their lives and release themselves from stubborn spirits that will not yield to ordinary prayers. Olukoya stated that, 'Some mountains in life will not fall unless they are bombarded with the artillery of prayer and fasting. The weapons of prayer and fasting have been known to do wonder when other methods fail. In addition some breakthroughs are impossible unless there is regular concerted, constant bombardment of prayers.'<sup>55</sup> The name is therefore sought and applied in the quest for supernatural intervention on behalf of the faithful. Weapons of spiritual warfare include the name of Jesus used to overcome the ploys of the enemies, the blood of Jesus as a weapon of defence and shield against all dangers and the fire of the Holy Ghost applied in deliverance sessions to torment stubborn spirits that will not yield ground. Apart from applying the 'fire of the Holy Ghost as a deliverance weapon, they share with the Pentecostals the practice of praying in the Holy Ghost or praying in tongues as a weapon of dislodging the enemy.

The emphasis is not in making Christians acquainted with the person of Jesus Christ or growing towards Christ-likeness, but as one writer remarked of the several prayer and deliverance programmes of the church, 'This programme is an avenue for people to come

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<sup>54</sup> P. Jenkins, *The new Faces of Christianity-Believing the Bible in the Global South.*, 103.

<sup>55</sup> *Church & Mission magazine*, 20.

together and pray on specific targeted needs such as job/employment, Holy Ghost baptism, anti-household wickedness.<sup>56</sup> In another instance, this observer notes that ‘Attendees eagerly look forward to these programmes and resounding messages abound on freedom from bondage, supernatural promotion, favour, breakthroughs, business success, endowment with power from above and several other blessings.’<sup>57</sup>

Some social analysts aver to the fact that the teachings of this church are not Christ centred, but a fear- driven theology and that the church recruits membership by stressing on the negative in the culture and society.<sup>58</sup> Christology is tangential to the growth of this church as the church attracts members from other churches based on their teachings for deliverance and protection from evil spirits in the society, typical of every other African society as they believe.

## **6.5 Christology of the Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria**

Anderson used the term African Pentecostalism to include indigenous Pentecostal churches that share historical, theological and liturgical links with the worldwide Pentecostal movement; and who like the Pentecostals, emphasize the power and manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the church.<sup>59</sup> ‘Akhilomen used Pentecostal Christianity’ as a phrase in Nigeria to describe ‘... all shades of Christian expressions, cutting across denominations and sects, which emphasize the abiding presence and efficacious employment of the gifts of the Holy Spirit manifesting in faith or spiritual healing, speaking in tongues, prophecy, seeing visions, etc.’<sup>60</sup> These churches as described here include churches of classical Pentecostalism from abroad and indigenous churches that emphasize on the holy Spirit manifestations.

The Pentecostals believe the presence of the Holy Spirit in any context can bring about dynamism, power and divine activities creating the supernatural as seen in diverse miracles, signs and wonders, faith healing, and deliverance. Faith healing is a contraption

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<sup>56</sup> *Church and Mission Magazine*, 20

<sup>57</sup> *Church and Mission Magazine*, 20.

<sup>58</sup> *Church & Mission Magazine*, 20.

<sup>59</sup> A. Anderson, ‘African Pentecostalism and the Ancestors: Confrontation or Compromise?’, *Missionalia* 21:1, April 1993(26-39).

<sup>60</sup> D. O Akhilomen, “Faith Healing and the Spirit of Beelzebub: A critical appraisal of Pentecostal Practices in Nigeria,” in S.O Abogunrin, *Biblical Healing in African Context*, Ibadan: NABIS, 2004, 171.



used to describe ‘...physical, mental and spiritual; recovery without any medical, scientific or physical remedies wholly comprehensible within the five physical sense and human mental rationality’. In Nigeria, faith healing embraces the desire for divine intervention in effecting and remedying physical, mental, spiritual, financial, political, marital and other social disequilibrium and diseases.”<sup>61</sup>

Burgess and others noted that Pentecostals delight in taking their views strictly from the Bible and refer to them as ‘pure Biblicist’,<sup>62</sup> as they always seek to adhere to biblical principles. The Bible for all purpose is an open book to all diligent believers and God reveals Himself as they learn, read constantly, memorize extensively and applied in all situations. It is in this regard that Pentecostals seek to emulate the teachings and works of Jesus Christ. They are concerned primarily with demonstrating the promised signs and wonders accompanying the new birth in Christ and empowerment by the Holy Spirit.

The creeds which are associated with nominal Christianity for over fifteen hundred years generally were not thought to be needed for interpreting Jesus in the Bible, since the believers had the Spirit of God to reveal him.<sup>63</sup> The critical element in Pentecostalism is the vital experience of the new birth (“born again”) signified by receiving Jesus Christ into one’s life, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit which gives the individual a new beginning and power to live daily for Christ, over sin and the devil. Ogbu Kalu noted that this stream of Christianity is good for Africans because it is a dimension of Africans ‘... allure to the Pneumatic ingredients of the gospel that resonate with the power theme in indigenous religions, the power that sustained the cosmos, the socioeconomic and political structures, the power that gave meaning to life’s journey from birth through death...’<sup>64</sup> In other words, the power emphasis to overcome challenges within the African environment makes these churches appealing to Africans, especially the youths. Everyone who is born again can personally receive this power and gifts of the Holy Spirit, such as the ability to prophesy and

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<sup>61</sup> D. O Akhilomen, “Faith Healing and the Spirit of Beelzebub:”, 171.

<sup>62</sup> S. Burgess, G. Mcger, and P.Alexander, ‘Jesus Christ in Pentecostalism’, in *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988, 486-487.

<sup>63</sup> S. Burgess, G. Mcger, and P.Alexander, ‘Jesus Christ in Pentecostalism’, 486-487.

<sup>64</sup> O.Kalu, *African Pentecostalism, An Introduction*, <http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/oso/public/content/religion/9780195340006/toc.html>. Accessed 18/09/2010.

speak in tongues. This movement according to Donald Dayton ‘...identity is revivalist emphasizing charisma, conversion and sanctification.’<sup>65</sup>

Ogbu Kalu argues that African Pentecostalism has a strong Christology because it is an experience of a new relationship with Christ as saviour, healer, sanctifier (who baptizes with the Holy Spirit) and the sustainer of the hope of glory. He is the soon coming king.<sup>66</sup> The centrality of Jesus Christ in Pentecostalism is never in question as he is always the ‘object of trust, the subject of teaching and the ethos of everlasting life.’<sup>67</sup> Their messages communicate Christ and adherents are encouraged to learn more of him in the Bible and cultivate a personal relationship with him through fellowship. According to Burgess, the Christ of the creed is docile and devoid of power, but the Pentecostal experience has produced a facile Christ- centricity, a biblical Christ who is always alive and whole as “the way, the truth and the life- not as an abstraction but as the wonderful counsellor, the prince of peace, the saviour...”<sup>68</sup>. Anderson argues that Western theology has generally not satisfied the African yearning to be protected from the evil forces that are existentially felt. But the Pentecostals have attempted to provide solutions to this emptiness, by empowering believers to live for Christ.<sup>69</sup>

In Pentecostalism, it is believed that Jesus does not only empower but he also blesses believers. The prospect of instant riches consequent upon placing faith in Christ is alluring the poor. Hanna Rosin defined this form of Pentecostalism thus,

The message that Jesus blesses believers with riches first showed up in the post war years, at a time when Americans began to believe that greater comfort could be accessible to everyone, not just the landed class...This stitched-together, home grown theology known as the prosperity gospel, is not a clearly defined denomination, but a strain of belief that runs through the Pentecostal Church and a surprising number of mainstream evangelical churches, with varying degrees of intensity.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> O. Kalu, African Pentecostalism, An Introduction,6.

<sup>66</sup> O. Kalu, African Pentecostalism, An Introduction,6

<sup>67</sup> S. Burgess, G. Mcger, and P.Alexander, ‘Jesus Christ in Pentecostalism’, in *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, 476

<sup>68</sup> S. Burgess, G. Mcger, and P.Alexander, ‘Jesus Christ in Pentecostalism’, 477.

<sup>69</sup> A. Anderson, ‘African Pentecostalism and the Ancestors: Confrontation or Compromise?’, *Missionalia* 21:1, April 1993(26-39).

<sup>70</sup> H. Rosin, ‘Did Christianity cause the Crash?’ <http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/print/200912/rosin-prosperity-gospel>, 2. Accessed 10/10/2009.

This form of Pentecostalism was popularized by famous American Pentecostal televangelists like Oral Roberts, Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland<sup>71</sup> and their associates in Nigeria like Archbishop Benson Idahosa (deceased). The “prosperity gospel” as it has become known teaches that ‘...God rewards the faithful with material success.’<sup>72</sup> This movement is popular among the poor and middle class in African urban centres.

At other instances, many of these popular televangelists have cross-crossed Africa propagating this message and showing off their influential lifestyle. Faith healing using the name of Jesus Christ is also a dominant theme here. It is taught among the Pentecostal churches that healing is meant for ‘...the whole person-the mind, body and spirit.’<sup>73</sup> The Full Gospel Business Men’s Fellowship of Nigeria is a non-denominational group that had been instrumental in propagating Pentecostal teachings in Nigeria.<sup>74</sup>

The General Overseer of the Redeemed Christian church of God, (one of the foremost indigenous Pentecostal churches in Nigeria), Pastor E.A Adeboye<sup>75</sup>, in an interview with *Newsweek* said Pentecostals have such an impact ‘because they talk of the here and now, not just the by and by ...We pray for the sick, but we pray also for their prosperity, for their overcoming of evil forces and so on. While we have to worry about heaven, there are some things God could do for us in the here and now.’<sup>76</sup> Adeboye’s comment exposes the general tendency of Nigerian Pentecostalism, the emphasis on prosperity rather true discipleship in imitation of Jesus Christ. The prosperity gospel is so called because of the emphasis given to

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<sup>71</sup> This writer participated in a revival programme conducted by Dr. Kenneth Copeland at Benin City, Nigeria in 1986. Dr. Copeland was the guest of Arch-Bishop Benson Idahosa, the late presiding bishop and founder of the Church of God Mission International, one of the foremost indigenous churches in Nigeria. At this yearly church convention programme, Copeland requested all present to sow a ‘seed faith’ and that God will multiply the seed (money) sown by individuals. He promised to ‘bless’ his friend, Arch-bishop Benson Idahosa with a personal jet like his too.

<sup>72</sup> Eric Gorski, ‘Evangelist Oral Roberts dies 91’, Denver: Associated Press, December 11, 2009, 1.

<sup>73</sup> Eric Gorski, ‘Evangelist Oral Roberts dies 91’, 1.

<sup>74</sup> The Full Gospel Businessmen Fellowship International is a foremost Pentecostal fellowship introduced into Nigeria in the mid-eighties and has been responsible for many becoming aware of Pentecostal teachings about health and wealth. It is a fellowship that caters largely for elite businessmen who are also Christians. They meet at high brow hotels in city centres and are reputed for reaching out to those in government and business sector of the economy. They have been highly successful in this drive and have been responsible for the drift of many influential Christians who were hitherto in the Mission or orthodox churches into the many newly established Pentecostal and African Indigenous churches like the Redeemed Christian church of God.(RCCG).

<sup>75</sup> Adeboye was rated by *Newsweek International* as one of the 50 World’s most distinguished personalities of the year 2008. See Lisa Miller, ‘Global Elite’, *Newsweek*, Dec.20, 2008.

<sup>76</sup> L. Miller, ‘Global Elite’, *Newsweek*, Dec.20, 2008, 49.

the well being of the spirit, soul and body as evidenced in the material blessings and good health of believers. The thrust of this teaching is that receiving Jesus Christ is a key to a prosperous life, and as previously stated, the Pentecostal orientation is this worldly.

In contrast, Jesus of the mission churches is seen as passive to the people's material and physical needs and aspiration and that is why many resort to their traditional religion in times of crises. Matthias Helms describes his experience with the Krobe people of Ghana in the following way:

The person of Jesus makes only little difference in the lives of Catholics in Ghana, because Jesus was presented to them in formulae and titles that come from different time and culture. These different concepts were learned by heart but were neither culturally understandable nor was the relevance for salvation comprehensible. In addition "salvation" was reduced to life after death and overlooked the struggle for life and well being in the concrete situation of the people here and now. The identity of Jesus was overstressed, while the first and more decisive question, what Jesus brought about was neglected.<sup>77</sup>

Helms' argument was that the mission churches were focused on the identity of Christ as the son of God and not explicating what he has done in delivering Africans from evil forces. This is corroborated by Osadolor Imasogie, who noted that for long the Christianity that was introduced into the African continent was in most part 'apologetic', devoid of power to meet the existential needs of converts to the new faith.<sup>78</sup> To the African, the essence of religion is to link the devotee to the transcendent thus empowering him to overcome the vicissitudes of this mortal existence.

The Christology of the Nigerian Pentecostalism is both existential and utilitarian. This, according to a Nigerian theologian is because, African Christians cannot afford a weak and powerless Jesus who is more human than divine, a mere historical figure as being peddled by some theologians in Europe. The Christ that will suffice for the African continent bedevilled by all manners of natural and man made disasters, dehumanizing conditions, decaying infrastructures, political oppression and corruption, tribal wars and genocide, hunger and famine, religious crises etc. is the original Jesus.<sup>79</sup> It is a non-Western Jesus, who

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<sup>77</sup> M.Helms, 'Who do men say that I am? ( Mt.16:15) Towards a response from the Krobo people in Ghana, West Africa.' [www.eapi.admu.edu.ph/eapr003/helms.htm](http://www.eapi.admu.edu.ph/eapr003/helms.htm). Accessed 12/05/ 2009.

<sup>78</sup> O. Imasogie, *Guidelines for Christian theology in Africa*, Ibadan: University Press Limited, 1983, 11.

<sup>79</sup> S.O Abogunrin, *In search of the Original Jesus*, 43.

as Brinkman opined is powerful, immanent, and is intimately involved in the lives of His people. It is this Jesus, who through His death and resurrection became triumphant over the power of sin, death and the forces of evil bedevilling the African continent. Abogunrin was also critical of the Jesus of the mission churches in Nigeria that he described as ‘...ready-made Jesus, encased in a statue of wood or gold, enshrined in Cathedrals, endorsed by the Church doctrines, is quite often, not the real Jesus...at least in the African continent and for Africans.’ The real Jesus according to Abogunrin, ‘...is the love of God that creates the miracle of redemption and life in abundance in the midst of hopelessness. The real Jesus is the pain of God mingled with the pain of humanity, as clearly demonstrated on the cross. The real Jesus is the hope of redemption in places where live despair in the midst of death.’<sup>80</sup> Abogunrin’s thesis on a different Jesus Christ appropriated in the Nigerian AICs and Pentecostal churches may be the reason for the outstanding growth of these churches.

Secondly, is the existential appeal of the prophets of these churches to meet immediate needs of people, i.e. ‘the here and now’ emphasis of the Pentecostal churches as stated by Adeboye. He said the Pentecostals do not emphasize on the ‘by and by’ but on the ‘here and now’. Robert Hood corroborated this when he averred to Jesus Christ given prominence in the hymnody of the Cherubim and Seraphim church in Nigeria, ‘A constant theme of urgency in the hymnody is that Jesus Christ is the reference who acts in dramatic ways in the here and now.’<sup>81</sup> The ‘here and now’ mentioned by Adeboye refers on power to meet current experiences of the people. Mbiti observes that the contemporary life of the adherents of the AICs, like the Pentecostal churches, feature prominently in preaching in these congregations. Clifton Clarke also noted that ‘AICs sermons are highly contextual and therefore draw heavily upon real life setting of their members.’<sup>82</sup>

Yusufu Obaje, another Nigerian theologian, also spoke of the popular image of Jesus of the mission churches as he stated that ‘The image of Christ that is before them is not that of the Saviour and the Lord of life who is able to deal squarely any given time with the contextual crises of life threatening or even sometimes terminating their very life.’<sup>83</sup> The Jesus of African Pentecostalism is that Jesus who has gone to be with the father in heaven but is present with us here too. Appiah-Kubi acknowledges this fact as he stated that the

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<sup>80</sup> S.O. Abogunrin, *In search of the Original Jesus*, 40.

<sup>81</sup> R. Hood, *Must God Remain Greek? Afro-Cultures and God-Talk*, 39.

<sup>82</sup> C. Clarke, ‘Towards a Post-Missionary Oral Christology among African Indigenous Churches in Ghana’ 3-10.

<sup>83</sup> Y. A. Obaje, ‘Theocentric Christology’ in J.S. Pobee, ed, *Exploring Afro-Christology*, 45

indigenous and Pentecostal churches ‘...view the divine as transcendent and immanent at the same time. The kingdom is to appear on earth-a new earth in this world. The belief is “this worldly” rather than the “other worldly”’.<sup>84</sup>

There are those who argue however that the here and now emphasis is not biblical but an adoption of the African traditional worldview that tend to link the good life and material blessings to the favour of the gods in this present time. Appiah-Kubi disagrees with this view as he believes that Africans respond to any religion that is both down-to-earth and proffers solutions to the existential needs of the people. He cites the appeal that the indigenous churches have on the people of Ghana that ‘... have attracted many adherents among the Akrans, who believe that for any religion to be meaningful, it must be practical, dynamic, and problem solving.’<sup>85</sup> The indigenous and Pentecostal churches with their verve and genius are merely expressing what it is to be an African and Christian at the same time. It takes an understanding of the African universe to appreciate the appeal of African Pentecostalism. Brinkman captures the essence of religion for Africans in this way,

Africans did not concern themselves with metaphysical (Hellenistic) issues such as the omnipotence, omnipresence, transcendence, eternity and providence of their gods before the arrival of Christianity and Islam. For Africans, religion had a pragmatic slant, directed at the here and now, health and welfare, personal success and a happy and fruitful marriage<sup>86</sup>

The Pentecostal churches hardly engage in critical theological issues, neither are they concerned about what an appropriate Afro-Christology should be. Their major concern is how to explicate the works of Jesus in their context and appropriate the blessings and power made available through the cross of Jesus Christ. What endears many to Jesus of the Pentecostal churches is that He saves, heals, delivers and blesses with the good things of life.

## 6.6 Summary

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<sup>84</sup> K. Appiah-Kubi, ‘Indigenous African Churches: Signs of Authenticity’, in K. Appiah-Kubi & Sergio Torres (eds.), *African Theology En Route*, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1981, 118.

<sup>85</sup> K. Appiah-Kubi, ‘Indigenous African Churches: Signs of Authenticity’, 120. There is a semblance in African traditional religion notion of the gods rewarding adherents with material blessings and Judaism’s view of reward of the righteous with material blessings and the punishing of the wicked with hardship and sufferings in present life. (See Deuteronomy in the Old Testament).

<sup>86</sup> M.E Brinkman, *The Non-Western Jesus-Jesus as Bodhisattva, Avatara, Guru, Prophet, Ancestor or Healer*, 210

There are different faces of Jesus in Nigerian Christianity, but the one most appealing is the face of a healer, a victor over life diminishing forces, the risen one who is to be worshipped and adored. This is because the average Nigerian is preoccupied with his health and protection, and therefore will readily subscribe to anything that will bring wholesomeness and protection from agents of darkness. Nigerians are confronted daily with life threatening realities for which they need a saviour and deliverer. Churches that make this their prime focus have influx of members who seek Him as their ultimate helper.

The appropriation of the name of Jesus Christ for healing and exorcism is a common element to the three churches under consideration in this chapter, though the degree of emphasis varies. Prayer fervour and prophetism are the hallmark of the Aladura churches. They are renowned also for the dominance of 'spirit influence and possession' in their worship encounters more than the portrayal of Jesus. Jesus is less visible to some degree than the spirit in worship, because of the emphasis on dreams, trance, and visions as medium of communicating God's purposes to adherents, and these are enabled by the spirit in the course of prayer and worship. The Cherubim and Seraphim Church (C&S), the Lord's Church (Aladura), the Celestial Church of Christ (CCC) are all African Indigenous Churches that stress so much on dreams, visions and trance as medium of communicating God's will especially to the troubled soul. Another common feature is the prominence giving to angels, and in some of these churches, angels are not only worshipped but they are made more visible and given higher status than Jesus Christ. But more than the newer indigenous or Pentecostal churches, the Aladura churches give prime emphasis to the contextualization of the gospel as they seek to make Jesus Christ more relevant in their cultural context. For example (and as previously stated), an arm of the Aladura Church equates Jesus Christ as the *Orisha* of the Yoruba traditional religion (the second in command in Yoruba cosmology) in a bid to bring Christianity to dialogue with the African Traditional Religion.

In summary, Jesus in the Aladura churches is seen more as a conqueror over evil forces, a victor of some sort over the vicissitudes that assail humans in their daily experiences.

The newer AICs like the MFM and para-church organizations like God Will Do It Ministry, took the Christological emphasis of the Aladura churches as a conqueror of evil forces further by emphasizing more on exorcism or deliverance as popularly called in these churches. The MFM is considered as deliverance ministry *par excellence* because of its chief

emphasis on exorcism as panacea for all Africa's problems. The travails that beset the ordinary African are seen purely from the perspective of the ubiquity of evil spirits in African societies that have to be exorcised for individuals and communities to be set free. This form of Christological emphasis is termed by certain Nigerian theologians as 'security gospel'.

Similarly, the critical issue for the Pentecostal churches in Nigeria is not so much as to explicate the identity of Jesus Christ as the son of God, but to appropriate his accomplishment on the cross by living life in its fullness. Jesus came to vanquish the enemy and grant access to the good life evidenced in good health, prosperity and a general well-being as expounded in the teachings of these Pentecostal churches. Christology here is this worldly, essentially from the context of what material possessions Jesus can reward the faithful with. The name of Jesus Christ in the Pentecostal setting is an harbinger of miracles, signs and wonders and abundance of life which members of these churches relish.

One setback in the Christological emphasis of the Aladura, the MFM and the Nigerian Pentecostal churches is an almost a near absence of emphasis on Christian discipleship. Christianity in these contexts is viewed purely from a utilitarian perspective. This contrasts with James Dunn's concept of character of discipleship, one of intimacy with God and of absolute dependence on Him. Jesus Christ calls his disciples little children, and 'To be a child...' according to Dunn 'is to be little, to need help, to be receptive to it. ...To become a disciple then, is to become like a child, that is to revert to a position of dependence.'<sup>87</sup> This is apparently absent in Nigerian Christianity, especially in some of the AICs and Pentecostal churches. The clamour for material gains and acquisition of wealth does not depict the life of disciples and eager followers of Jesus Christ, who have learnt the art of submission to the master and dependence on him in child like trust.

What appears to be common to the Christologies of the AICs, MFM and Pentecostal churches is the utilitarian value attached to the name of Jesus Christ, to appropriate one blessing or the other, so that the believer can live a life totally free from negative and life inhibiting experiences. To the Aladura churches, Jesus is perceived as a conqueror over evil forces, hence a triumphant Christology. The MFM sees Jesus Christ more of an exorcist,

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<sup>87</sup> J.D.G Dunn, *Christianity In The Making Jesus Remembered*, (Vol.1), Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing co., 2003, 551.



while Jesus Christ to the Pentecostals is a miracle worker and healer par excellence, whose healing activities covers physical, mental, social and economic maladies.

The differences in the Christologies of the AICs, the MFM and Pentecostal churches lie in the way Jesus Christ is appropriated in these various contexts. The AICs seek to appropriate Jesus Christ in a way that will resonate with their traditional religious context. Jesus Christ is given names that fit images in local contexts that speak of invincibility, power, greatness, wisdom, eternity, etc. The MFM Church's Christology can be seen only from the perspective of power and exorcism. Every human problem in the African context has a negative root in the world of malevolent spirits, and it will take only deliverance or exorcism to be rid of such. Christology rises and falls in the MFM Church with exorcism. Pentecostal Christology in Nigeria on the other hand can be explicated on the basis of a good life. Jesus Christ is appropriated as a giver and guarantor of the good life, the proof of which is prosperity, good health and a lot of wealth that distinguishes the favoured from the impoverished lot in the poverty stricken African society.

These are the different faces of Jesus Christ as seen in different denominations in the Nigerian religious scene. It remains to be seen if there can be a face that can suffice for all denominational contexts in Nigeria.